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Young African Leaders
Initiative Fellows Panel
Discussion on Water Projects
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initiative-fellows-panel-
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07/11/2016, -
Hydropolitics Speaker Series

EVENTS CALENDAR

WATER, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY IN GLOBAL HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



From Friday, May 13, 2016
To Saturday, May 14, 2016
Mershon Center for International Security Studies
1501 Neil Avenue | Room 120
Columbus, Ohio 43201

[Register here for this event](#)

ARCHIVED EVENTS

Academic Year

Month

SEARCH

Water, Power and Control in Greater Eurasian History

This conference is the first of two linked international conferences focused on the provision, management, use, and cultural meanings of water and its relationship to patterns of human culture, politics, technology, and socio-economic organization across geographies and chronologies. The conference will focus on two related themes: "Water and Power" and "Controlling Water."

The second conference will take place in mid-May 2017 and will focus on the intersecting topics of "Water and Culture" and "The Effluent Society." Through these four themes our program spans a broad range of vital and interconnected topics posed by "water." The conferences, which will be held at the Mershon Center at The Ohio State University, will be run as workshops with papers distributed in advance to ensure the most productive discussions and will include "keynote" lectures, one for each theme. Papers will be published either in edited volumes or special issues of environmental history journals.

"Water" constitutes a multi-faceted topic of overwhelming historical and contemporary significance. Water defines every aspect of life: from the ecological to the cultural, religious, social, economic, and political. Without the molecule H₂O, life as we understand it would cease to exist. Water remains at the center of human activity: in irrigation and agriculture; waste and sanitation; drinking and disease; floods and droughts; religious beliefs and practices; fishing and aqua-culture; travel and discovery; scientific study; water pollution and conservation; multipurpose dam building; in the setting of boundaries and borders; politics and economic life; and wars and diplomacy. Water also plays an important symbolic role in works of literature, art, music, and architecture, and it serves as a source of human beauty and spiritual tranquility.

The study of water poses questions that cross boundaries: physical, political, cultural, and disciplinary. It constitutes an ideal theme for collaborative and comparative analysis over a range of methodological perspectives. The two conferences will also extend the scope of the investigation beyond human dimensions to the biosphere as a whole. By bringing together a range of ecological, geographical, chronological, and methodological perspectives, the program addresses pressing issues at the intersection of culture, environment, health, biology, and economy.

"Water" recurs as a theme in news, policy, and academic discussion, carrying different meanings and values, many associated with issues of societal survival, resilience, prosperity and conflict. Sometimes it appears as a tool: a means of transportation, an irrigation source, a reservoir, the base of ecosystem services. At other times it lies at the heart of a crisis: a tsunami, a flood, a vehicle of



Nicholas Breyfogle
Associate Professor of
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pollution, a vector of disease, a source of international contention or conflict. Its meaning and value change across time and space and vary from one human community to the next.

Water resources — the need for clean and accessible water supplies for drinking, agriculture, and power production — already represents one of the most complicated dilemmas for major parts of the 21st century world and promises to grow in importance. The World Water Forum has reported that one in three people across the planet will not have sufficient access to safe water by 2025. As population grows, glaciers melt, and aquifers are depleted, many analysts anticipate that the world will fight more over water than any other resource in future decades. Rationing the world's water will be a foundational ethical question of the 21st century.

Further, oversupply of water — floods — represent a continuing threat to populations even in the economically and technologically advanced regions of the world. The World Commission on Large Dam's estimates that more than 50 percent of Japan's population is subject to flood risk. Hurricane Katrina provided sharp reminder for Americans of their own exposure to flood risk. Both cases raise issues of the culpability of modern riparian management designed to limit flood risk.



Philip Brown
Professor of History
The Ohio State University

As the world faces the challenges of water usability, supply, and more, human societies' past experience managing water can offer a stimulus to thinking outside the limited array of perspectives that dominate debate today. Two examples are suggestive: Early Modern Japan worked out extraordinarily sophisticated approaches to managing water conflicts that have been suggestive of how to deal with similar issues today, most prominently in the work of Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom ("Governing the Commons" and other work). In other instances, past mechanisms of flood amelioration in Japan and elsewhere involved less ecological impact than reinforced concrete dikes and dams, and today, in Niigata Prefecture, a company has been formed to deploy other traditional techniques of water control to replace concrete structures.

Equally important, past experiences can suggest complications to common solutions and approaches to water management that should be avoided or for which compensatory plans require development, especially the need to be alert to unintended environmental and social consequences of narrowly conceived solutions to specific water-related challenges (e.g., the ways in which installing new concrete dikes changes hydraulic characteristics of rivers leading to the collapse of dikes that had long withstood flood ravages in the area south of Niigata City, Japan, in 2004).

This conference is co-sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences, East Asian Studies Center, Center for Slavic and East European Studies, Institute for Korean Studies, Department of History, Russian, East European, and Eurasian History Seminar, Environmental Studies Network, Sustainable and Resilient Economy Discovery Theme, and Northeast Asia Council.

Conference Program

Day 1 (Friday, May 13, 2016)

Controlling Water

Inland waterways and oceans play vital historical roles, presenting both opportunities and hazards to human society. This segment of our program considers human efforts to harness water, contain its destructive power and the unintended consequences that often follow these efforts. Participants will explore the history of floods and flood control, irrigation and drought protection, the politics of dams, and the histories of individual lakes and rivers as reshaped by human engineering for reasons of transport, hydroelectricity, flood prevention, and waste disposal). The program also focuses on the human nexus with flora and fauna, including efforts at conservation and protection of watery environments. We seek to illuminate the ways human efforts to manage water transformed physical and hydrological systems, linked ecosystems, and the political, economic, social, and cultural structures of human communities.

Introduction to the Workshop: 9-9:30 a.m.

Session I: Ensuring Supply: 9:40-11 a.m.

I-1) Megan Duncan Smith, Harvard University, "The Conception of Kakhovka Hydroelectric: Water, Energy, and Nature in Soviet Ukraine, 1946-1950"

I-2) Ruth Mostern, University of California, Merced, "Loess is More: Arid Asia and the Yellow River Disaster Regime"

Coffee and snacks: 11:00-11:30 a.m.

Session II: Conservation, Environmentalism, and the Politics of Development: 11:30 a.m.-12:50 p.m.

II-1) Mark Sokolsky, The Ohio State University, "Rice, Water, and Race in the Soviet Far East, 1918-1938."

II-2) David Pietz, University of Arizona, "The Baiji: Writing the History of Extinction on the Yangtze River"

Lunch: 12:50-2 p.m.

Keynote Lecture: 2-3:30 p.m.

Jamie Linton, Queen's University, "Fluid Relatives - The Hydrosocial Cycle as a Tool for doing the History of Water"

Coffee and snacks: 3:30-4 p.m.

Session III: Overabundance: Responding to Floods: 4-6 p.m.

III-1) Yasuaki Chino, Nihon University, "Lessons from the Past? Suggestions from Early Modern Japanese Riparian Engineering"

III-2) Ling Zhang, Boston College, "Dyking or Diverting, Blocking or Channeling: Yellow River Hydraulics in Northern-Song and Jin China, 960-1234 CE"

III-3) Shin'ichiro Nakamura, Nagoya University, "A History of 'Design Flood' -Why Does Japan Use 'Probability' to Make Flood Prevention Plans?"

Day 2 (Saturday, May 14, 2016)

Water and Power

From the earliest large irrigation works, control over water has involved control over people; who gets what benefits, but also control over the labor and resources necessary to build, maintain, and sustain water control facilities. The intersections of water and political, economic, and social power historically span domestic and international politics and operate at scales ranging from the local to the global. Over the past few centuries, the ability of government and enterprise has grown to marshal financial and material resources to construct massive hydraulic projects, plan the development of major international waterways, and alter the real or perceived threat of water shortages in the face of social and climatic changes.

Participants will consider the role of water in national development schemes, water distribution as a tool of political power, international disputes over waterways and water supplies, and the place of water in armed conflicts, including the use of water as a weapon (e.g., destroying an enemy's dikes and dams, and poisoning water supplies). Building on the broad (often criticized) discussions of the relationship between water management and political power proffered by Karl Wittfogel (Oriental Despotism) and James Scott (Seeing Like a State), we charge participants to explore not only how ruling elites and states plan and utilize projects, but also to explore the ways in which political power and social hierarchies have themselves been defined and redefined by water and its control.

Session IV: The Power of Water: 9-10:20 a.m.

IV-1) Scott Levi, The Ohio State University, "The Khan Giveth, and the Khan Taketh Away: Water and its Uses in the Rise and Fall of the Khoqand Khanate, 1709–1876"

IV-2) Paul Josephson, Colby College, "Water and Power in the 21st Century: Putin's Dam Builders and Russian Politics" [Via Skype]

Coffee and snacks: 10:20-10:50 a.m.

Session V: Water and State-Building: 10:50 a.m.-12:50 p.m.

V-1) Eric G. Dinmore, Hampden-Sydney College, "Channeling Japanese Growth in the Twentieth Century"

V-2) Dorothy Zeisler-Vralsted, Eastern Washington University, "Volga-Volga: Harnessing a Soviet River"

V-3) Alan Roe, Georgetown University, "The 'Altai Alternative': Tourism and the Fight against the Proposed Katun Hydroelectric Station in the Altai Mountains." [via Skype]

Lunch: 12:50-2 p.m.

Session VI: State-Building and Empire: 2-3:20 p.m.

VI-1) David Fedman, University of California, Irvine, “Seeding Like a State: Erosion Control and Watershed Management in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945”

VI-2) Beatrice Penati, Nazarbayev University, “‘A Field Upstream is Better than a Mirab Broth-er’: Who Paid for the Water in Tsarist Turkestan?”

Coffee and snacks: 3:20-3:50 p.m.

Session VII: Water and the Culture of State-Building: 3:50-5:10 p.m.

VII-1) Robert Winstanley-Chesters, Cambridge University/Australian National University, “Hy-draulic Foundations: North Korean Hydrological Engineering and its connections with Political Charisma, Development and Statecraft”

VII-2) Alexei Kraikovski, European University at St. Petersburg and Julia Lajus, High School of Economics, “‘Like a Groom on His Wedding Day’—The Gulf of Finland as the Metropolitan Bay of Russia and The Baltic Sea in the Environmental, Technological and Cultural History of St. Petersburg.”

Session VIII: Wrap up and Concluding Remarks: 5:20-6 p.m.

What have we learned and where do we go from here?

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